

Making Investments to Strengthen Our Economy

Published in the Natomas Journal in May of 2008.

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by Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui

By now, it is clear that Natomas, and all of California, has been particularly hard-hit by the current economic climate. That is why I am developing legislation to address the housing crisis and provide responsible assistance for hard-working Americans who have been affected by the current trends.

Thanks to the action taken by Congress earlier this year, this month, rebate checks will be hitting mailboxes in Natomas. The first recipients will be those who utilized direct deposit when filing their income tax returns. Paper rebates will be arriving shortly for traditional filers. And, for those seniors and veterans who are eligible to receive rebates but do not normally file income tax returns, the deadline has not passed you by. Those residents simply need to file a 1040 or 1040A tax form before October 15, 2008, to receive their rebate check.

These checks will help American families weather these rocky financial times. With record-breaking gas prices and the steadily increasing cost of groceries, it is clear that the stimulus payments will provide much-needed relief.

However, as we look ahead, it is clear that this is only a first step. We must take decisive action now to shore up our economy in the long-term and secure our nation's prosperity in the future. I am continuing to fight for long-term solutions to bring stability to our economy, and to our housing market.

Recently, I attended a foreclosure workshop in Sacramento. I heard from many residents who were attempting to find a responsible way to avoid foreclosure. However, many lenders are facing a serious backlog of requests, and many homeowners were not provided with enough time to find an alternative before their adjustable rate mortgages reset to unmanageable levels.

We must take action to provide relief to families who are at risk of losing their homes. I am crafting legislation that will freeze foreclosures for responsible borrowers, so that they have enough time to find solutions to their financial troubles. This is not a bailout or a handout: it is a timeout, and will keep hard-working people in their homes.

What started as instability in one section of our housing market has now extended into every aspect of our economy. It has sent shockwaves through our financial markets and is reverberating in the global market. As we face an uncertain economy, certain realities are glaringly evident. It is clear that we must take action to stabilize our economy, addressing both short-term and long-term concerns.

In the short term, we should provide added support to unemployment and food stamp programs. Updating these systems will give our economy an immediate boost.

In times of economic downturn, an increased number of families and individuals fall into financial crisis and are in need of assistance. More and more families and seniors will qualify for aid through initiatives like the State Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicare and Medicaid, and federal housing assistance programs. We cannot let the burden for funding these basic-needs programs be shifted to the states.

Here in California, the state is required to balance its budgets every year. In order to meet this requirement, the weakening economy could force the state to institute program cuts or tax increases. It is incumbent upon the federal government to provide adequate state relief through an additional stimulus package.

We also know just how vital our transportation and infrastructure is to the vitality of our communities. Beyond providing the backbone of our region, undertaking these projects has historically been the quickest and surest way of injecting new life into our economy. They bring good new jobs, and fuel local businesses. As our flagging housing industry brings new home construction to a grinding halt, these jobs will be needed across our region-and the country.

Finally, we must address the growing expense of health care. No family, when already faced with insurmountable bills and costs, should have to make the choice to go without adequate health care. The federal government must turn its focus to meeting the needs of the elderly and disabled who depend on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. Congress has the duty to restore funding levels for these critical programs. With a responsible budget, we can do that without deficits and debt that would have a long-term negative effect on the economy.

The generations of lawmakers that have gone before us had the vision to invest in the framework for our communities. Now, it is our responsibility to maintain and improve these systems, and invest in the future sustainability of our society.

All too often, it takes a time of disaster or economic downturn to point our focus to this task. I believe that we must make responsible investments now to ensure our future economic stability and public safety.

In California, and in fact, as a nation, we have a long history of hard work, dedication, and meeting any challenge head-on. But now, it is time to dig in our heels and have the moral fortitude to make good on our promises to the citizens of the United States of America: to truly work to take this country in a new direction.